

# Chapter 6

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*Teachers, not assessment, must be the cornerstone  
of any systemic reform directed at  
improving our schools.*

GEORGE MADUAS



## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In the book *The Right to Learn*, Linda Darling-Hammond (1997) states:

When all is said and done, what matters most for students' learning are the commitments and capacities of their teachers. Teaching for understanding cannot be produced solely by spending more money or by requiring that schools use specific texts or curriculum packages, and it cannot be driven by mandating new tests...Although things like standards, funding, and management are essential supports, the sine qua non of education is whether teachers know how to make complex subjects accessible to diverse learners and whether they can work in partnership with parents and other educators to support children's development. (p. 293)

Professional development is more than just ensuring professional accountability. If we expect our students to achieve at high levels, then we too as educators must hold ourselves to high standards.

### THE NEW JERSEY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

In the last decade, New Jersey has made significant reforms to strengthen preservice education and licensing requirements for beginning teachers. In keeping with the adoption of the *Core Curriculum Content Standards* and the educational demands they present, the State Board of Education recently adopted, for the first time, regulations that require professional development for all New Jersey teachers and educational services personnel. In fact, New Jersey was one of the only states that did not already require continuing professional development. These regulations require 100 hours of state-approved continuing education every five years beginning in the year 2000. The content of each individual's continuing education will be specified in his/her Professional Improvement Plan (PIP). In those rare situations when a teacher fails to make annual progress towards the requirement, the school district has the responsibility to take early and corrective action based on accepted principles of progressive supervision and related statutes and regulations. A key element of this initiative is the active, vital role that teachers themselves will play in the establishment of common standards and criteria for educational offerings. These new regulations support school reform initiatives and reflect national trends in professional development.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A NEW PARADIGM

Professional development is undergoing profound changes to meet these demands. As envisioned by Dennis Sparks and Stephanie Hirsh (1997), there are 11 major paradigm shifts in staff development designed to focus energies on meaningful and productive professional experiences. Staff development is moving:

1. From district-focused to school-focused approaches;
2. From individual development to individual development and organizational development;
3. From fragmented, piecemeal, one-shot efforts to staff development driven by a clear and coherent plan;
4. From a focus on adult needs and satisfaction to a focus on student needs, learning outcomes, and changes in on-the-job behaviors;
5. From training conducted off-site as the primary delivery system to multiple forms of job-embedded learning;
6. From the transmission of knowledge and skills by experts to the study by teachers of teaching and learning;
7. From a focus on generic instructional skills to both generic and content specific skills;
8. From staff developers who function as trainers to those who provide consultation, planning, and facilitation as well as training;
9. From staff development provided by one or two department staff developers to staff development being a critical function and responsibility of all administrators and teacher leaders;
10. From activities directed solely at teachers to programs involving everyone who impacts student performance; and
11. From staff development as a frill to staff development as an indispensable process.

This expanded version of staff development requires significant planning on the part of teachers and school administrators. "Learning to practice in significantly different ways can occur neither through theoretical imaginings alone nor through unguided experience alone. Instead, it requires a tight coupling of the two." (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 319) Research supports the notion that teachers learn in much the same ways as students. Rich professional development is centered on the critical elements of teaching and learning: planning, evaluation, development, investigation, and professional discourse. Professional development experiences that succeed provide teachers with experiential engagement in concrete tasks involving teaching, assessment, and observation. The activities are connected to and derived from the teachers' work; thus, teachers are involved in questioning, experimenting, and researching. Professional development enhances collaboration and supports systemic school change efforts. Finally, effective staff development opportunities are sustained and intensive, utilizing such strategies as modeling, peer coaching and mentoring, observation, and collective problem solving to institutionalize the effects (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Staff development experiences should be varied and intensive and allow time for practice and reflection. Adult learning can take place in many forms and use various processes. Professional development planners need to vary the content and format of these experiences to meet the needs of all school staff. Essential topics for effective staff development experiences are listed below.

### Subject Matter

It is imperative that health educators and physical education teachers remain keenly aware of frequent changes in content knowledge. Professional development experiences should focus on the following:

- Current information on topics (e.g., new diseases, cures, drugs, data)
- Relationships between content (e.g., multiple risk behaviors)
- Current research in the field (e.g., CDC profiles, Surgeon General's reports)
- Connections to everyday life (e.g., decisions about sex, drugs, driving)
- Content as a foundation and how ideas can be linked and assembled (e.g., teaching the relationship between physical activity and mood)
- How to determine existing student knowledge and tailor content accordingly
- Laws relevant to content (e.g., DUI laws, confidentiality laws)
- Trends in the field (e.g., healthcare, insurance)
- Resources
- Certification in specific content areas (e.g., water safety, CPR)
- Technology as a tool in instructional delivery
- Skill practice and behavior change

### Child/Adolescent Development

Teachers of health education and physical education deal with a wide range of physical, social, and emotional levels of development. It is imperative that teachers have an understanding of the following concepts:

- Normal growth and development
- How students think and behave
- Goals of students
- Student interests
- What students know
- Concepts that may be difficult for some or all of the class to grasp
- Culture, language, family, and gender issues
- Prior schooling
- Knowledge of the community

- Intelligences demonstrated in the class
- Preferred approaches to learning
- How students view the curriculum
- Motivation and feedback
- Student self-images
- What students care about
- What success means to the students

### **Teaching and Learning**

As described in Chapter 4, teachers need to become acquainted with new ideas and theories regarding teaching and learning. Professional development opportunities that focus on teaching and learning should include discussion of the following:

- The kinds and purposes of learning
- The context for learning
- Strategies to support different kinds of learning, materials, and tasks
- Specialized instructional tools (e.g., adaptive equipment)
- Modes of cognition
- Information processing
- Neuroscience/brain research
- Communication skills (e.g., language acquisition)
- Motor development

### **Assessment**

Teachers of health and physical education need time to practice and refine assessment skills. Staff development in this regard should focus on the following:

- Identifying student strengths
- Testing various intelligences
- Interdisciplinary measures
- Reasoning skills
- Developing rubrics, task cards, and self-assessment measures
- Developing performance assessments
- Planning lessons and using assessment
- Instructionally embedded assessment
- Special needs adaptations

**Resources**

Not only do teachers need to become cognizant of new content information in health and physical education, but they also need to know where and how to access up-to-the-minute information. It is no longer adequate to rely solely on a textbook for instruction. Staff development opportunities need to focus on the following:

- Inquiry beyond textbooks
- Using technology
- Exploring community service, volunteer, or service learning experiences for students and staff
- Locating and using available resources
- Collaborating with community health resources
- Planning, budgeting, and seeking outside funding support for specialized projects

**Curriculum Development**

Too often teachers are left to their “own devices” when it comes to developing curriculum. Professional development experiences, designed to prepare teachers for curriculum development, should include information about the following:

- State, national, and local standards
- Available resources
- Text and material review and selection process
- Goals and objectives and how they link with assessment
- Interdisciplinary opportunities
- Research based programs (e.g. CDC, NDN)
- Articulation (e.g., grade levels, school-to-school, district-to-district)
- Curriculum revision process
- Analyzing test results, health data, and student behavior to refine and improve program

**Collaboration**

An effective comprehensive health and physical education program requires the players (students, teachers, other school staff, parents) to collaborate to foster student achievement and success. Professional development opportunities should focus on the following:

- Instructional activities that promote student collaboration (e.g., cooperative learning, teams)
- Productive discourse in the classroom
- Strategies to promote parent involvement
- Strategies to support school and community wellness
- Collaboration with community health resources

- External funding support for programs and projects
- Extracurricular links to classroom instruction
- Peer mentoring, peer mediation, coaching, and cross-age teaching
- School and community partnerships
- School staff networks

## **IMPROVING TEACHER PERFORMANCE IN THE HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION CLASSROOM**

Effective comprehensive health education and physical education programs depend on trained teachers. Research indicates that the classroom teacher is the key to student achievement. New and exciting trends in the field, along with emerging health issues and knowledge, necessitate planned professional development experiences that allow teachers to validate existing practices and develop their competence and confidence to implement innovative and effective teaching strategies.

Comprehensive health education and physical education deal with sensitive and sometimes personal issues in both students' and teachers' lives. Effective teacher training builds commitment, understanding, skills, and attitudes that foster instructional practices to support the achievement of the *Standards*. Professional development programs in health and physical education should be designed to:

- Develop positive attitudes towards and commitment to health and physical education;
- Provide teachers with the structure, content, and philosophy of the district's health and physical education program;
- Increase the teacher's understanding of learning theories and principles of behavior change as specifically related to wellness;
- Improve teaching and facilitative skills;
- Prepare teachers to deal with sensitive issues and controversy; and
- Acquaint teachers with school and community health resources that support instruction.

Professional development experiences need to balance health and physical education content and theory with ample opportunities for hands-on experiential learning. Many teachers, accustomed to "read the book and answer the questions" modes of instruction, have a great deal of difficulty adjusting to an interactive classroom and a facilitative role. These same teachers may have difficulty using cooperative grouping, role-play, and case-study approaches. Becoming comfortable with these modes of teaching increases the likelihood that the teacher will at least try to employ the methods in the classroom. Teachers may benefit most from observing master teachers or working with another teacher who is comfortable in a more facilitative role. As new classroom practices are adopted and implemented, coaching and circles (networking groups) reinforce and enhance skill development. Teachers need to become comfortable with these mechanisms in much the same way as students do (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997).

The effectiveness of any health and physical education professional development experience is greatly enhanced by continued support that deals with new questions and problems as they arise. Students often ask questions that may seem inappropriate or may be difficult to answer. How the teacher deals with such questions may determine his/her credibility for the remainder of the year. Practicing similar situations with other professionals enables teachers to anticipate such situations and handle them more effectively when they do arise. Booster sessions, where health and physical education teachers can discuss problems, issues, and successes, help address gaps in preservice educational experiences and provide on-going opportunities for collegial exchange.

Effective staff development addresses the needs of the participants. No doubt the range of content knowledge, skill performance, and commitment will vary among staff members. To develop effective experiences with benefits for all participants, staff development planners should solicit information using a simple needs assessment and use the information obtained to plan experiences focusing on the needs of the participants in relation to the *Core Curriculum Content Standards*. At the conclusion of the session, participant feedback enables the planners to adjust the content and training as necessary and can be used to support additional training sessions.

Professional development in health and physical education is not limited to attendance at workshops or training sessions. Professionals must remain cognizant of emerging health and social issues that profoundly impact health and physical education instruction. One can keep abreast of these changes by reading professional literature, (e.g., *Journal of School Health*, *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance*) and browsing health-related Web sites. Teachers should attend medical seminars and state, regional, and national conferences. In addition, professional health educators and physical educators can be involved in research; take advanced college work in the field; and apply their knowledge and skills in other venues such as healthcare facilities, camps, and recreational programs. Health and physical education networks, organized by state-level organizations such as the New Jersey Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (NJAPERD) and the New Jersey State School Nurses Association (NJSSNA), foster professional growth, assist teachers to create purpose and direction, build collaborative structures, and promote commitment. Networks create activities and relationships, provide leadership at the school district or building level, and address specific issues such as funding or community support (Lieberman, & Grolnick, 1997). As informal mechanisms, networks bring people together to discuss issues of importance to the field and will continue to play an important role in professional development experiences.



## SUMMARY

Beginning in the year 2000, all New Jersey teachers and educational services staff will be required to accumulate 100 hours of professional development experiences over a five-year period. Research shows that teachers who are supported in a variety of helpful and challenging staff development opportunities become partners in improving their schools and their districts.

Staff development and school improvement efforts are personal experiences shaped by the players and circumstances involved. They are more than just training designs; they are the net result of planning, trial and error, assessing results, and sustaining commitment to improvement (Loucks-Horsley, et al. 1987, p.7)

For comprehensive health and physical education specialists, staff development opportunities are a critical link to establishing instructional practices that enable students to develop the knowledge and skills needed to become healthy, competent, and caring adults.